



**Public Hearing on the  
Corridor Location Study  
for the Possible  
Relocation/Improvement of**

**US-131**

**from North of Schoolcraft to  
the Michigan/Indiana State Line**

**November 13, 1997**

**3:30pm to 5:00pm &**

**7:00 pm to 8:30 pm**

**Three Rivers Middle School**

**1101 Jefferson Street (M-60)**

**Three Rivers, Michigan**

The two session are for the convenience of the public. Feel free to attend either session. The location of this open house type public hearing is accessible to individuals with mobility impairments. The parking lot has reserved parking spaces and has ramps to the cafeteria/auditorium. Upon request, M•DOT can make this publication available in alternative formats such as large print or audiotape by calling (517) 373-9534 or (517) 373-2090 (TDD).

## **Introduction & Need**

US-131 is a statewide principal arterial serving north-south traffic in Michigan's western lower peninsula, extending 270 miles from the Indiana state line north to the city of Petoskey. As such this roadway services many motorists traveling to and from the segment considered in this study: from north of the Village of Schoolcraft southerly to the Indiana state line.

The US-131 Area Development Association of Michigan has promoted the completion of US-131 as a freeway from the Indiana state line to the straits of Mackinac. The association began actively promoting the freeway concept for the segment from north of the Village of Schoolcraft southerly to the Indiana state line in the late 1980's.

The high volume of trucks using US-131 disrupts community activities and creates traffic mix concerns. Truck volumes represent 14 percent of the average daily volume which is double the typical commercial volume along rural non-freeway routes. This high volume of trucks also causes vibrations and noise when they travel through Schoolcraft, downtown Constantine, and its registered historic district.

Currently US-131 has an at-grade Grand Trunk Railroad crossing at the south village limits of Schoolcraft. Train operations at this crossing are projected to double from 30 to nearly 60 operations in the next ten years. The number and length of those trains will increase traffic delays and create long traffic backups on both north and southbound US-131.

This Corridor Location Study Report was designed to present recommendations for the general location of an improved

and/or relocated trunkline highway and the type of cross section design that will best satisfy the M•DOT's responsibility. The goal of this study was to serve the public interest by providing for the efficient movement of people and goods in harmony with state and local long range plans and objectives.

The principal planning objectives to be satisfied by this process included:

1. Maximizing trunkline service and efficiency
2. Minimizing impacts to farmland and environmentally sensitive areas
3. Containing future costs of construction
4. Recognition of local and regional development plans

This Corridor Location Study Report involved an analysis of present and future physical, economic, social, cultural, environmental and traffic issues as they relate to state trunkline highway requirements. It also involved the use of public opinion surveys which showed consensus among local units of government and businesses next to the existing route for improving the existing US-131.

## **Comprehensive Consensus Building Effort**

Views and comments were solicited from federal, state and local government agencies as well as private groups and citizen surveys. M•DOT conducted two public information meetings at which more than 350 persons attended. Here are the most frequently voiced comments from citizens and public officials:

1. Maximum use of the existing right-of-way, while minimizing the

- disruption to farmland and residential properties.
- 2. Increase safety, reduced congestion, noise and vibration levels in Central Business District areas.
- 3. Provide for the least amount of negative impacts to environmentally sensitive areas such as the Blue Heron rookery southwest of US-12 and US-131 near Blue School Road and the Pigeon River.
- 4. Increase the efficiency of travel by separating US-131 through traffic from local traffic especially in Schoolcraft and Constantine.
- 5. The potential economic impact of a relocated US-131 on the villages of Schoolcraft and Vicksburg.

## Corridors Considered

This Corridor Location Study Report examined seven possible options. A **CORRIDOR STUDY** refers to an area of varying width, having beginning and ending points, through which traffic with common origins and destinations will pass. Study corridors are typically from one to six miles wide and are selected as specific areas within which alternate highway alignments can be planned and developed. The corridors in this study are one mile wide. All seven US-131 corridors begin north of U Avenue in Kalamazoo County and end at the Michigan-Indiana state line in St. Joseph County. See map on the next two pages.

**Corridor A-** Goes around the western edge of Schoolcraft and back to the existing alignment. The path continues southerly with the existing alignment either centered on the path or offset to the east of the path. This corridor passes west of Three Rivers and crosses the St. Joseph River west of Constantine. It returns to a path where the existing US-131 alignment

is slightly offset to the east side of the path. This path then continues to the state line. Shown as green and yellow on the map.

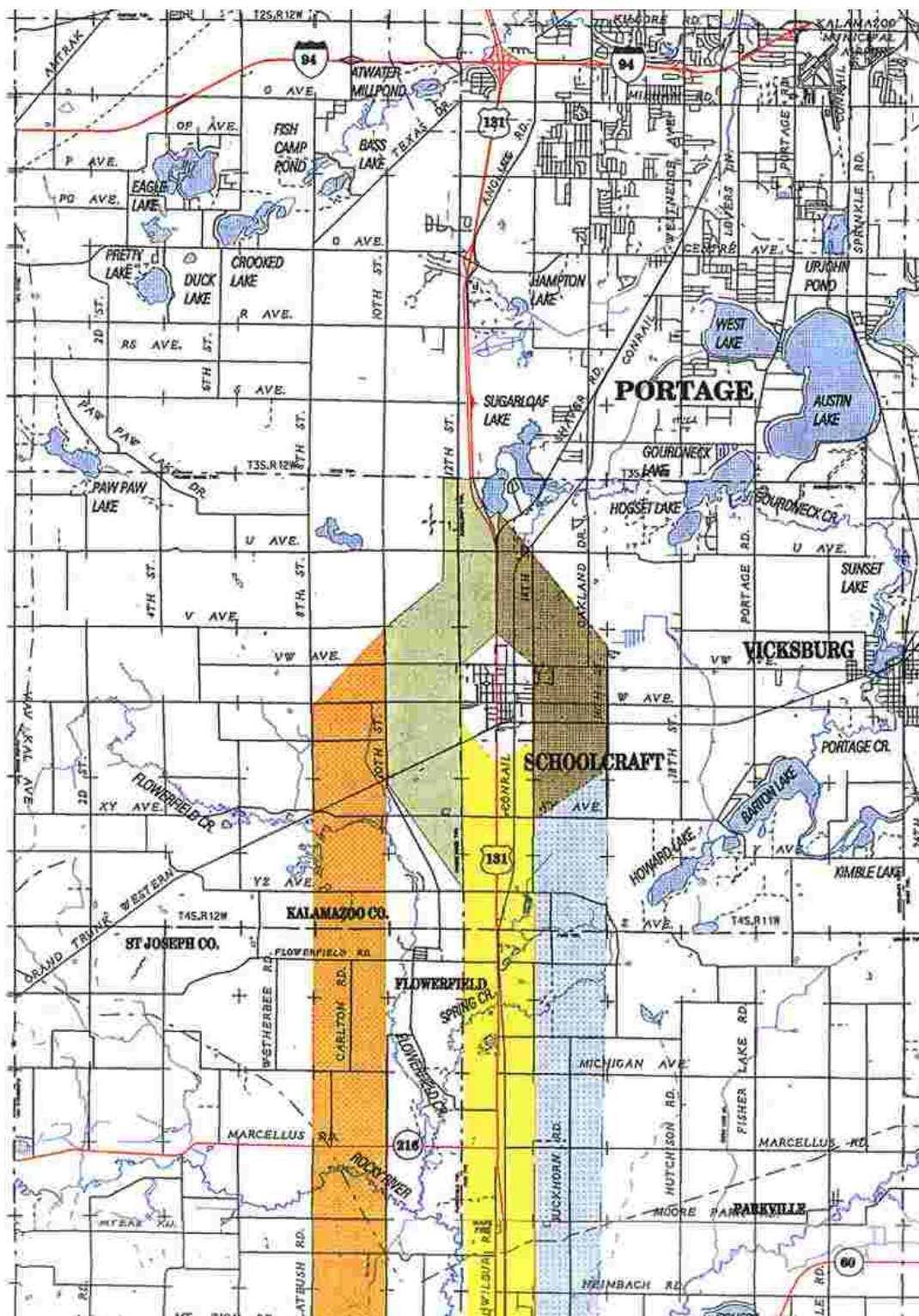
**Corridor B-** Is similar to Corridor A except in the northern part where Corridor B goes around the eastern edge of Schoolcraft. Follow the brown and yellow paths on the map.

**Corridor C-** Goes around the west of Schoolcraft and follows a southerly path more than two miles west of the existing US-131 until west of Three Rivers. From Three Rivers south this corridor follows the same path as Corridor A. Green, orange, and yellow map out this corridor.

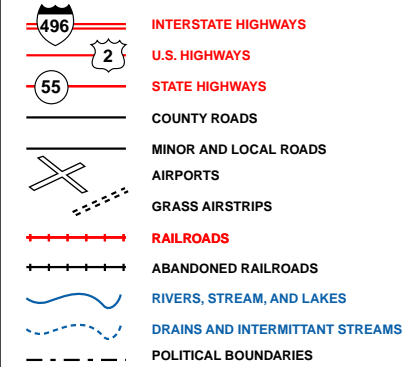
**Corridor D-** This corridor passes east of Schoolcraft and follows a southerly path about half a mile east of existing US-131. This corridor goes around the east of Three Rivers. It then follows a southerly path east of Lutz Road until Featherstone Road where the corridor turns southwest until south of Constantine. From there it follows existing US-131 to the state line. See the brown, blue, pink & yellow path.

**Corridor E-** This corridor follows the same alignment as corridor A north of Three Rivers and south of Constantine. The middle part is the exception. Corridor E follows a path east of Three Rivers and east of Constantine. It then joins the existing alignment to the state line. The green, yellow, pink, and yellow combination make up this corridor.

**Corridor F-** This is the "Do Nothing" alternative. This alternative is the base condition against which the Department compares all other alternatives: This alternative assumes that routine maintenance would continue, but no major improvements would be done.



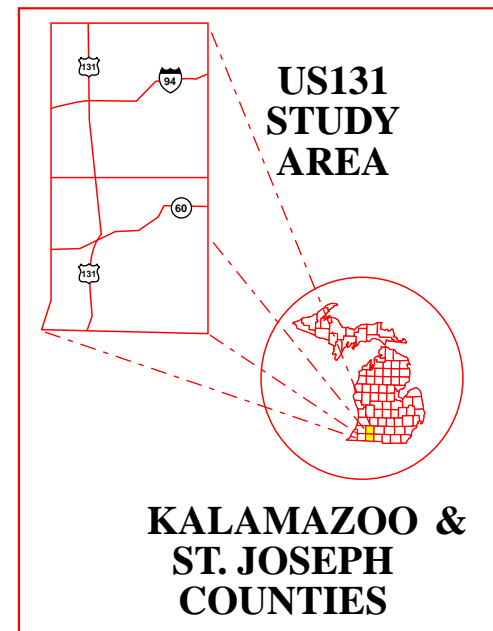
## LEGEND



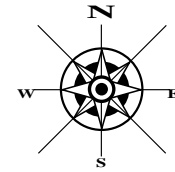
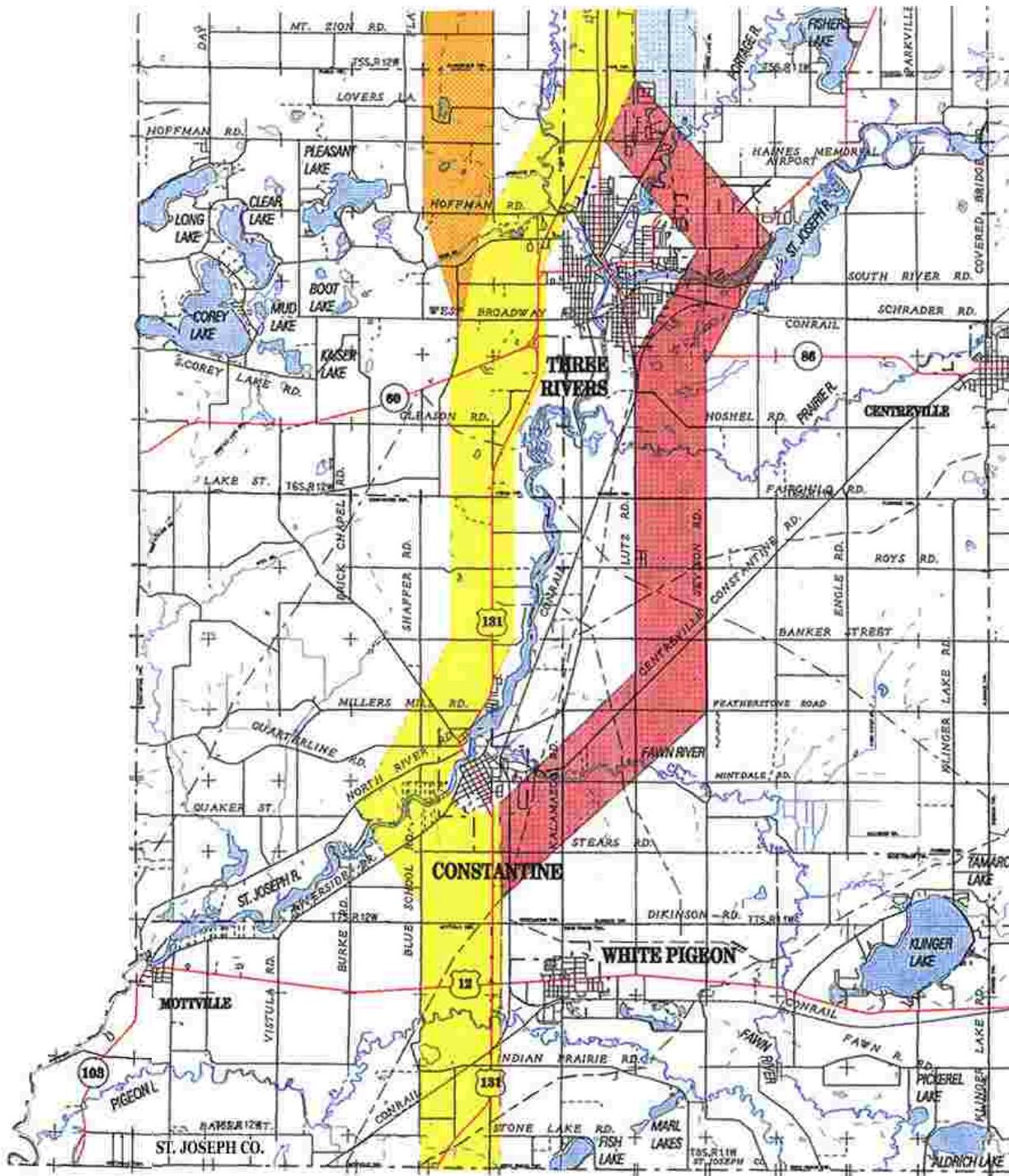
## STUDY AREA MAP

### US-131 CORRIDOR ALTERNATIVES

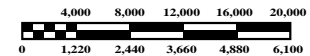
- A GREEN, YELLOW
- B BROWN, YELLOW
- C GREEN, ORANGE, YELLOW
- D BROWN, BLUE, PINK, YELLOW
- E GREEN, YELLOW, PINK, YELLOW
- F DO NOTHING







SCALE IN FEET



SCALE IN METERS

1 MILE EQUALS 1.609 KILOMETERS

# US131

FROM MICHIGAN / INDIANA STATE LINE  
TO SOUTH CITY LIMITS  
OF THE CITY OF PORTAGE

## EXHIBIT 1



PREPARED BY THE  
MICHIGAN DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION  
BUREAU OF TRANSPORTATION PLANNING  
ENVIRONMENTAL SECTION

## **Environmental Review**

The purpose of identifying and assessing potential social, economic, and environmental impacts of the corridors is to compare the number and extent of the impacts that may be involved when developing and designing specific alignments. The most relevant social, economic, and environmental factors within the corridor limits are agriculture, wetlands, surface water and floodplains, and potential displacement of homes and businesses. M•DOT will assess these and other factors in more detail with the study of specific alignments.

The environmental review found that maximizing the use of the existing US131 right-of-way has the potential of causing the least overall impact on the agricultural, wetland, and the surface water and floodplains. It also found that maximizing the use of the existing US-131 right-of-way has the greatest potential for displacing homes and businesses. This is especially so between Schoolcraft and Three Rivers, if the existing road is upgraded to a limited access roadway. The historic resources of Schoolcraft and Constantine limit the types of improvements possible through these towns. M•DOT cannot determine the exact impacts until specific location and design is selected.

## **Recommendation**

The study recommends that US-131 be relocated and/or upgraded within corridor A. The recommended corridor will provide maximum trunkline service and effectiveness (shorter distances and travel times) to the traveling public.

Corridor A has some significant advantages, such as, containing future construction costs by using existing rights

of way and eliminating the need for multiple and costly bridges east of Schoolcraft and Constantine plus, it provides minimal disruption to residential development throughout the entire study area. This corridor also minimizes the impacts on prime farm land especially those farms enrolled in Act 116 Farmland Preservation Program and/or farms with pivot irrigation systems.

Corridor A would create less disruption to existing and future residential and commercial development between the Village of Schoolcraft and Vicksburg. An eastern bypass of Schoolcraft has the potential of affecting residential character and location because of the number of subdivided parcels within this area. Potential effects include undesirable noise levels and aesthetic views related to highway design and travel.

## **M•DOT & Local Coordination**

M•DOT has worked cooperatively with two local groups in the development and selection of the preferred corridor. The assistance and guidance of the Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study and the US-131 Corridor Master Plan Committee helped M•DOT select a corridor that a majority of the directly impacted agencies prefer.

In Kalamazoo County, M•DOT presented its preferred alternative to the Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study, (KATS). KATS is the metropolitan planning organization for transportation planning within the Kalamazoo metropolitan area, as defined under Section 134 of Title 23 of the United States Code. As such, that organization must approve all highway and road proposals before the Federal Highway Administration will authorize any federal highway funds for design, right-of-way purchase and construction. KATS has approved the preferred corridor with

stipulations regarding the alignment's design and schedule.

In St. Joseph County, M•DOT has had a series of meetings with the US-131 Corridor Master Plan Committee. This intergovernmental group consists of all the local governmental jurisdictions that are next to US-131 . This group was established to work with M•DOT in defining its preferred corridor and to begin establishing land use plans and zoning ordinances that are coordinated with the proposed improvement. The US-131 Corridor Master Plan Committee has endorsed the corridor that M•DOT has chosen as the preferred corridor.




## What is next?

After this public hearing, the Corridor Location Study Report will be completed. The next step will be to develop highway alignments within the selected corridor, determine the design, and develop a draft environmental impact statement. This process will eventually lead to the reconstruction or relocation of existing US-131 from north of Schoolcraft to the Indiana state line.

The chart below shows a typical time schedule for the construction of a new highway on new right of way. It is an example of how long the process takes.

### STEPS IN A HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION PROJECT ON NEW RIGHT-OF-WAY (TYPICAL TIME SCHEDULE)\*

| STEP                     | YEAR                    |     |   |      |      |      |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|-----|---|------|------|------|
|                          | 1st                     | 5th | 6th                                     | 10th | 11th | 15th |
| CORRIDOR STUDY           | CORRIDOR STUDY APPROVAL |     |   |      |      |      |
| ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY      |                         |     | APPROVAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT |      |      |      |
| PRELIMINARY ENGINEERING  |                         |     | DESIGN STUDY APPROVAL                   |      |      |      |
| SURVEY                   |                         |     |   |      |      |      |
| DESIGN                   |                         |     |   |      |      |      |
| RIGHT-OF-WAY ACQUISITION |                         |     |   |      |      |      |
| CONSTRUCTION             |                         |     |   |      |      |      |

WORK PHASE   
 DECISION POINT   
 PUBLIC HEARING 

\* The time schedule of projects will vary due to project length, environmental complexities, and/or local issues.

## **Public Hearing Format**

The public hearing is your opportunity to voice your opinion on this corridor study. The public hearing for this study will be conducted using an "open forum" style of hearing. This informal type of hearing allows the public to gather facts on the study on a one to one basis. It also makes it easier for citizens to learn as much as possible and express their concerns about the corridor study.

Court reporters will be available to record any verbal statement. If interested in making a statement or comment about the corridor study, persons attending may do so anytime during the hearing. Their comments will appear in the transcript of this public hearing. Citizens can also fill out a comment form and deposit it into

the comments' box at the public hearing site. They can also mail their comments to the department at the address shown on the bottom of the form. The deadline for comments is December 1 , 1997. We urge citizens to take advantage of one of these methods to let the Department know your views on this corridor study.

About thirty days after the public hearing, a copy of the complete transcript including all the written comments received will be available for public review at the **Schoolcraft Village Hall**, 154 W. Eliza St.; the **Three Rivers City Hall**, 333 W. Michigan Avenue; the **Constantine Village Hall**, 1 15 White Pigeon Street; **M•DOT's Southwest Regional Office**, 1501 E. Kilgore Road in Kalamazoo, and at **M•DOT's Bureau of Transportation Planning**, in Lansing.

Please address your comments, or make requests for additional information to:

**Jose A. Lopez, Acting Public Hearings Officer**  
**Bureau of Transportation Planning**  
**Michigan Department of Transportation**  
**P.O. Box 30050**  
**Lansing, MI 48909**  
**(517) 373-9534**



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The Michigan Department of Transportation has published this public hearing brochure pursuant to the requirements of the Public Involvement/Public Hearing Procedures for Federal-Aid Project Development for Michigan projects. In accordance with Michigan Executive Directive 1991-6, the cost of publishing the 500 copies of this document is 0.78 cents per copy at a total of \$387.50.